

NEW JERSEY STATE BOARD: NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OF EXAMINERS : REVOCATION/SUSPENSION PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONER : DECISION
v.

ROBERT CRAWFORD : DOCKET NO. 433 – 01/97-192
RESPONDENT

BEFORE THE STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

RECORD CLOSED: May 29, 1991 DECIDED: June 17, 1999

At its meeting of June 17, 1999, the State Board of Examiners reviewed a decision forwarded by the Office of Administrative Law that recommended that Robert Crawford's Teacher of Psychology certificate be revoked. Crawford currently holds only that certificate.

This case originated when the Executive Director of Archway School submitted information to the State Board of Examiners indicating that Crawford had forged certain signatures on the documentation that he had submitted in support of his certification application. In addition, Crawford had indicated that he had completed the alternate route program through his employment as a teacher at Archway. In fact, the Executive Director maintained that Crawford had never been an alternate route teacher candidate there, but rather worked in the Human Services Division within the mental health area, supervising the after school program.

As a result of this information, the State Board of Examiners asked the Department of Education's Office of Compliance to investigate the matter. The results of that investigation prompted the Board of Examiners to vote to issue an Order to Show

Cause to Crawford at its February 26, 1998 meeting. Crawford responded to the Order to Show Cause on July 27, 1998.

On September 22, 1998, the Board of Examiners transmitted the case to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for hearing. Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Bruce Campbell heard testimony for two days in March 1999. After receiving post-hearing submissions, the record closed and the ALJ issued an Initial Decision on May 6, 1999, holding that Crawford relied on forged documentation to obtain his teaching certificate and therefore that Teacher of Psychology certificate should be revoked.

The record of this matter and the Initial Decision of the OAL have been reviewed. Crawford's exceptions and the Deputy Attorney General's (DAG's) reply were both timely filed pursuant to N.J.A.C. 1:1-18.4.

Crawford's exceptions allege that certain documents he submitted did not require signatures and therefore the signatures that do appear on those documents cannot constitute forgeries. Exceptions, p.1. In addition, Crawford objects to other findings of the ALJ that conclude that Crawford submitted false and misleading information to Department of Education staff and that Crawford cannot show that he taught the required number of hours in order to satisfy the certification criteria. Exceptions, p.2. Crawford further argues that the ALJ's conclusions are mistaken because: he did not have Crawford's original paperwork; Crawford was unaware of any forgery; only the summative evaluation required the supervising principal's signature; the finding that Crawford did not work the required hours was never raised by the Department of Education; undue weight was given to the testimony of one of Archway's administrators; and there was no evidence of Crawford's dishonesty here. Exceptions, pp. 2-4.

In her reply to Crawford's exceptions, the DAG maintains that the ALJ's findings are accurate statements of the facts contained in the record. For example, the Contract submitted by Crawford has a signature line for the Chief School Administrator, contrary to Crawford's assertion that the contract did not need to be signed. Reply, p.1. Moreover, Archway's Chief School Administrator at that time, Dr. Paul Winkler, testified that his signature was forged. Reply, p.2. The DAG also disputes Crawford's assertion that it was the Department of Education's obligation to request corrected documents when an applicant submits forged documents. Reply, p.3. Furthermore, the DAG points to several witnesses' testimony to refute Crawford's claim that he did, in fact, teach the requisite number of hours. Reply, p.3. She also pointed to the Order to Show Cause to rebut Crawford's conclusion that arguing this point was beyond the scope of the pleadings. According to the DAG, "clearly the nature and extent of Crawford's teaching was at issue." Reply, p.5. The DAG also disputed Crawford's allegations that he had no knowledge of any misleading information submitted to the Department. Reply, pp. 5-6. She also rejected Crawford's assertion that the ALJ gave undue weight to the testimony of Archway's administrator. The DAG argued that the ALJ could find that Crawford's testimony was not credible regarding his relationship with this administrator, even if that testimony was uncontradicted. Reply, p.5. Finally, the DAG faulted Crawford for failing to provide pertinent transcripts of the hearing to bolster his claims that the ALJ wrongly determined that he had acted dishonestly. Reply, p.6.

Upon careful and independent review of the record in this matter, this Board finds no basis in either the record or the exceptions to challenge the ALJ's credibility determinations and conclusions. See Matter of Morrison, 216 N.J. Super. 143, 159 (App.

Div. 1987)(if the contesting party does not provide transcripts, administrative agency has no duty to review them before issuing determination regarding the ALJ's findings and recommendations.) We therefore agree with the ALJ that Crawford submitted falsified documents and documents that contained forged signatures. Moreover, the record clearly establishes that Crawford did not fulfill the requisite teaching requirements in order to obtain alternate route certification.

In considering the appropriate penalty, the ALJ held that revocation, while an extreme measure, was warranted since "dishonesty in dealing is involved here." (Initial Decision, slip op. at 30). Consequently, the ALJ ordered Crawford's Teacher of Psychology certificate revoked.

The State Board of Examiners may revoke or suspend the certification of any certificate holder on the basis of demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher or other just cause. N.J.A.C. 6:11-3.4. Furthermore, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident, if sufficiently flagrant. Redcay v. State Board of Education, 130 N.J.L. 369, 371 (S. Ct. 1943), aff'd. 131 N.J.L. 326 (E & A 1944). In this case, Crawford has obtained a certificate through fraudulent means. The system of certification in this State ensures the public that each certificate holder is properly qualified for the position held. Any certificate fraudulently obtained "demeans the value of all certificates" and "harms the integrity of the teacher certification system." In re Williams, No. 214-2/94 (Examiners Dec. 14, 1995)(decision on remand).

A teacher who knowingly subverts the certification process does a great disservice to his students and his school district. That individual has no place in a classroom. In this case, Crawford's actions are especially egregious since he had not

even become a certified teacher yet. His dishonest behavior so early in his career does not bode well for his future. Thus, as ALJ Campbell concluded, the only proper response to Crawford's breach is revocation.

Accordingly, the Initial Decision of the OAL directing that Crawford's Teacher of Psychology certificate be revoked is adopted for the reasons expressed therein as well as those articulated in this decision. It is therefore ORDERED that Robert Crawford's Teacher of Psychology certificate be revoked on this 17th day of June 1999. It is further ORDERED that Robert Crawford return his certificate to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Licensing, CN 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within fifteen (15) days of receipt of this decision.

Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing: August 6, 1999

Appeals may be made to the State Board of Education pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:6-28.

IBG:MZ:br:robertcrawford